

Three Months

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I tell you I miss you and I call you on side streets while I forget which direction I turned 10 minutes ago. I keep ending up on Belmont Street and missing 31st St. where Coco's blue house sits. I circle around and around and you tell me your thoughts on the Bay and I listen intently, I wonder if I haven't taken enough notes, if I haven't come to enough conclusions, if I've let these days pass by me, but there were all of those jade plants, I noticed those jade plants walking up the steep hillside in the Castro, the street whose incline never faded, never leveled off, and whose thick waxy green jade branches poked through fences and over planters and there was so much rosemary, and there were beautiful black succulents and things felt a little dried out, but there was a distinctly Mediterranean feel to the glimpses of densely packed houses along distant hillsides, the flash of blue Bay water, the faded pastel houses grouped next to each other, the cacti, the dried out sidewalks, the hills that lifted up as though the ground was lifting before my eyes, as though the earth didn't want me to see the top, as though I might go careening backwards along the cable car rails.

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The flight from Kuala Lumpur was smooth, and I sat next to a couple speaking Polish, her with a shaven head and him with messy blonde hair and a beard, both wearing long tunics and billowy pants. She held a bongo and he a ukulele and a copy of 1984. How freeing it must be to make your way through the world held down only by a book and a ukulele. I am still delirious from being in transit for two full days, from subsisting on Transaero food for a full day, hard white rolls in cellophane wrappers, chocolate-hazelnut bars and soggy jam and hazelnut-filled crepes. I am filled with sugar and anticipation and I pass over clouds and land masses. I needed to know how the Indian Ocean smelled on a Tuesday morning, I needed to be reminded that it's possible to not begin a Tuesday in Marquette, MI where everything makes sense and I know

where Center Street leads and the biggest choice of the day is would I like to walk up Fourth Street or would I like to walk down Third Street, and there isn't much of an objective difference between the two, in this town built by a lake in almost Canada where in spring pieces of green poke and jab through muddy, sodden earth, claw their way out of the ground, attempt to find resting spots, before they are downtrodden by the elements. Things manage to be sustained. Things manage to not be killed. To not be overtaken, to not succumb. Things do not thrive here. Things manage to not get run over, not get run down, not collapse out of sheer exhaustion. I want to eat handfuls of sand, feel the grainy freshwater bits trickle down, make their way in and around, the silt scratchy and cool, such jagged pieces.

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I am eating roasted carrot salad with lemon vinaigrette and arugula and shaved parmesan and sipping Puglia Rossa and the crostini has a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and a sprinkle of lemon zest and I'm warm and life feels delicious and I am miles from the scenic tundra I've called home for nine months. Tonight my life is vintage prints of tomatoes and radishes in gold frames along a single stretch of wall. Tonight life is being gifted a piece of tiramisu and did you know I used to request tiramisu in place of birthday cake? I sit alone at the bar, I sip wine. Life feels so small and so nice, the knife across the plate, the sprigs of arugula, thin and delicate.

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I go to address letters that are late coming for Mother's Day and my sister's college graduation and I start to write out a return address but pause. I don't remember the house number of the studio apartment I just moved into. There might be stamps at the bottom of the slim paper bag that's held these cards for nearly a week now, and I pause to look

at the envelope. I put my first and middle initial followed by last name with nothing underneath it, the absence of type announcing I have no home. There is such a sense of satisfaction at the blank space that follows my name. The loops of “a”s and “r”s and nothing there to ground them, orbiting around the precise edges of the envelope. There, a mass of consonants and vowels, congealed together temporarily, the sturdy envelope giving them weight, solidity.

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Pica is the term for craving non-food items. Pregnant women are known to crave dirt. Supposedly the practice goes back centuries. I am not pregnant but I feel some solidarity for a tradition that dates back so long. The term pica stems from a Latin term that roughly translates as “false appetite.” I don’t know what I am hungry for these days. Some claim that this inclination I am feeling should be resisted at all costs, since I may ingest parasites and viruses, but I wonder how the dirt could be so bad when it’s grown such lovely yellow roses. If I sneak a scoop of soil will I grow long, thorn branches? Will my fingertips turn to rose petals? Will they fall off one by one? Will a May day be the moment they reach their peak? Will June see my rapid decline?

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I note his azure-blue eyes, imagine the softness of his lips, pay close attention to whether he laughs at my jokes, pay close attention when he talks about his reasons for moving to Oakland all the way from Maine, his artistic impulses and motivations. I pay close attention when he speaks and all the while I tell you I miss you, which is true, but what if you had been there? Would I have sat next to him at the bar? I tell you I miss you and I mean it. I tell him I will send him postcards from Bali when only three days ago we rode in car and drove up and down a single block in SE Portland, in a futile attempt to find parking and I made a joke with Leon, and looked back at the two of you and you smiled at me in a warm, adoring type of way. You caught me off guard with that smile. I pointed out a spot big enough for Coco’s car to fit in and we ate wood-fired

pizza in a chic space and sipped sparkling Italian water. And yet here I am wanting to kiss another person. Will I ever stop wanting to kiss other people? Will I ever stop packing my bags? I miss you I miss you I miss you, that is all very true.

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I pay the thirty-five-dollar Indonesian tourist visa fee and a small purple piece of paper is placed inside my passport. I walk through a wide open room, beige carpet with floor to ceiling windows where it is quiet and calm. I am still wearing an oversized sweater and as I step outside of the airport the heat overwhelms me. The colors are technicolor and my vision blurs so I find a spot on a bench and wait to get cell phone reception again, so I can ask Sally once more, “The driver is here, yes? It is really just after 1:00 pm yes? I am really in Indonesia yes?”

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You recommend the vegan diner on Alberta. You put a copy of *Fugitives and Refugees* on hold for me at Powell’s, I must text you the third line down on page 90. I wander down Pine Street to 12th and I leave Sweet Pea Bakery with a vegan chocolate chip cookie and I’m wondering if maybe I want to take myself to that Elliott Smith documentary? I pick up and begin reading a copy of *Women* in Powell’s Bookstore one afternoon but leave with a copy of *The Book of Beginnings and Endings* and wonder why I can’t figure out what happened to *Chloe and Finn*.

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I am very enamored of the feeling of wet cement lately, of bare feet across cool, damp cement. I spent an entire research grant getting to this room in Ubud and I just want to wander the grounds of the Onion Collective while tropical rain comes down and feel the wet cement under my feet, watch the geckos dash across the walls, listen to the frogs. I want to grab handfuls of iron-rich dirt piled up alongside the roads, I want to grind down a chunk of cement sidewalk and feel the sediment wind through my

intestine.

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Tonight I saw the Golden Gate Bridge. I drank in a dimly lit bar where I sat on a dark wooden stool and sipped whiskey with pepper, and I wanted to text him, I wanted to say meet me, I wanted to say, come have a nightcap with me, come and find me at the Heart & Dagger. Instead I climbed another hill and another hill and how many hills does San Francisco have and I looked out at the lights down below and Audrey told me that there, there in front and just to the right was the red light of the Golden Gate Bridge. Tonight there was just a single flashing red light at each end. I asked when the streets became covered in snow and ice. She told me that didn't happen. Couldn't it happen one day? Had it never happened before? That doesn't happen she said again. I imagined the sidewalks covered in ice anyways. I imagined the treachery of a hill of snow in San Francisco*.

[*The last time it snowed in San Francisco was 1976. It melted quickly.]

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On the phone we talk about chaos. We talk about tornadoes and hurricanes and fires, the Earth's way of correcting imbalances. I worry you will think me morbid so I make note of how nice the weather is here today. No humidity, just a few low hanging, intermittent clouds. I think I'll go for a walk later.

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I almost don't make it to Bali when the flight attendant in Moscow notices I am missing an Indian Visa. I explain the situation, I will only be in Delhi two hours until I catch my next flight. While I stand to the side and wait he talks in hushed Russian on the telephone and I wonder if perhaps I will spend the next three and a half weeks in this terminal of the Moscow Airport. There are sleek clothing stores, a cafe where I can order my morning coffee, and a kiosk with crackers and cards. Moscow is blue-gray sky

and caviar ads. Moscow is stern. After several minutes the man thanks me for my patience and ushers me onto flight 455.

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Three more months on the road. Three months of tightly rolled tops and bottoms, linen pants and leggings that won't take up too much space, sheer thin blouses which can condense down to a few inches at the bottom of a ten-year old blue and gray suitcase. The same suitcase I took to Italy a decade ago. Ten years I've put things in, and taken them out, of the blue and grey suitcase. A decade. Do you know the weight of a decade? The consonants. The vowels. The space. Always aware of how much space I take up. Aware of the black cashmere socks with holes in the toes.

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This morning I spy the Williamsburg Bridge, I watch joggers and cars and cyclists head into Manhattan. At one point I was a person spied through layers of cityscape, a figure glanced while typing up some thoughts, a half noticed shadow, a blur of a red bike, a moving piece of landscape. I have been back one full day and I feel no pull, no sense of immanent importance to plot out my return. Life cannot be brunch and waiting for the A train and watching it all float by. I cannot be some passing figure on a bridge at 8:28 in the morning, never to be glimpsed again.